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Creating a Broader Interest in Drama in a Boston Evening Center

THE SOCIAL CENTERS OF 1912-13

By Clarence Arthur Perry

The facts set forth herein were gathered by means of a post-card questionnaire sent to 788 superintendents of schools. The returns, when checked off with the data furnished by our clipping service and other reports, were found to represent practically all of the cities which had definite undertakings of a social center character.

Of the results secured, those which may be compared with the figures published for the previous season are as follows:

	1911-12	1912-13
Cities reporting <i>some</i> paid workers.....	44	*71
Cities in which Board of Education provided heat, light and janitor service.....	72	*126
Expenditures reported.....	\$139,535	*\$324,575

It will be observed that while the number of cities reporting paid workers has not quite doubled, the amount of the expenditures reported is nearly two and a half times as great as it was in 1911-12. That is, in places where the movement has got started its rate of growth is higher than the rate at which it spreads to

* In order to make these figures more justly comparable cities reporting only one line of activity (see page 3) have been excluded in this table.

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new localities. Its actual results are more effective in getting public support than the words of its most enthusiastic champions.

The seventy-one *cities which reported some paid workers in carrying on evening activities other than those of the regular night school were as follows:

Cities with paid workers

California	Massachusetts	New York
Los Angeles	Boston	Buffalo
Santa Rosa	Cambridge	Geneva
Colorado	Chicopee	New York
Denver	Dedham	Niagara Falls
Pueblo	Gardner	Rochester
Connecticut	Malden	Saugerties
Stamford	Natick	Schenectady
Waterbury	Winchester	Watertown
Illinois	Worcester	North Dakota
Chicago	Michigan	Grand Forks
Evanston, Dist. 76	Detroit	Ohio
Oak Park	Grand Rapids	Canton
Ottawa	Kalamazoo	Cincinnati
Rockford	Pontiac	Columbus
Indiana	Minnesota	Hamilton
Crawfordsville	Minneapolis	Youngstown
Gary	Red Wing	Pennsylvania
Mishawaka	St. Paul	Philadelphia
Iowa	New Jersey	Pittsburgh
Burlington	Bloomfield	Reading
Des Moines	East Orange	Rhode Island
Sioux City	Elizabeth	Newport
Kansas	Englewood	West Virginia
Leavenworth	Jersey City	Wheeling
Kentucky	Montclair	Wisconsin
Louisville	New Brunswick	Kenosha
Louisiana	Passaic	Milwaukee
New Orleans	Paterson	Oshkosh
Maryland	Trenton	Superior
Baltimore		West Allis

New information

In the hope of obtaining more information than we were able to publish last year regarding the kinds of activities being carried on in social centers, the first question in our inquiry was devoted to this subject. Nine lines of activities were submitted and the superintendents were asked to enter in the appropriate spaces the number of schools engaged in each. Because of the labor involved, information was not requested as to the number of times a week such schools were open for the activities with which they were credited.

The lines of evening activities, not a part of night-school work

* The cities included in the above list reported at least two lines of activities (see classification on following page). The following also reported paid workers, but only one line of work: Bridgeport and Middletown, Conn.; Kokomo, Ind.; Methuen, Mass.; Winona, Minn.; Lincoln, Neb.

or limited to pupils, which were reported, together with the total number of buildings in which they were carried on, are as follows:

	Schools	Lines of activity
1 Public lectures and entertainments (not school exercises) ..	981	
2 Adult clubs, societies or associations (not solely teachers) meeting in school rooms ..	706	
3 Open meetings for the adult discussion of local problems ..	496	
4 Athletics, calisthenics, indoor active games or folk dancing ..	474	
5 Club work among young people ..	369	
6 Reading or quiet-games room ..	198	
7 Social dancing for old or young ..	190	
8 Singing classes, orchestras, or other musical organizations not limited to pupils ..	174	
9 Handicraft or domestic-science classes not a part of evening-school work ..	153	



How Boston Evening Centers Attract Girls

These results show the kinds of evening privileges which were afforded in 207 cities last winter. They tell nothing as to the amount of each activity in any of the buildings included in these totals. How many, for example, of the 474 buildings reporting athletics had them only twice during the entire season and how many offered this privilege four times a week is not known.

The total number of workers engaged in carrying on the above activities cannot be stated. Some cities said "many," several gave a number that was obviously too large, while others gave no figure at all. The paid workers reported by the cities listed on page 2 totaled 1927. A conservative estimate, based upon such evidence as the returns afforded, would place the number of volunteer workers at 1500. So that, in the 207 cities reporting

The staff of workers



The Detroit Corporation Counsel Inspiring an Interest in Civic Affairs

activities, it may be conjectured that there were over 3000 persons engaged in conducting them.

The board of education furnished the heat and light in 167 of the 172 cities which reported on this point, and in 142 of these the janitor service also was provided by the board.

Balloting during elections was held in 529 schoolhouses, and 259 buildings were used for registering voters.

Political meetings or rallies to the number of 481 took place in school edifices.

Motion picture entertainments were given in school buildings on 626 occasions.

The exhibits held in school buildings numbered 302, of which 175 were devoted to art and manual training subjects, 76 were held in the interest of physical welfare, and the remainder were of a miscellaneous character.

To the question as to how many buildings were, by their patrons, called "social centers," "recreation centers," etc., 89 cities replied, reporting on 330 buildings. The following table shows the number of schools designated under the various names:

Political
Use

Miscella-
neous
occasions

Title	No. of schools
Social Centers.....	181
Recreation Centers.....	89
Civic Centers.....	25
Social and Recreation Centers.....	17
Social and Civic Centers.....	7
Evening Centers.....	4
School Centers.....	4
Community Centers.....	3
Total.....	330

The number
of social
centers not
known

It might be thought that the total number of buildings shown in the last table represented the number of school centers in the United States during the season of 1912-13. Unfortunately this total cannot be given such significance. One of the cities whose "10 social centers" were included in this number reported, under the head of activities, that the buildings were used only for public meetings, lectures and entertainments, twice a month. Another city's card showed 4 schoolhouses affording athletic, reading-room and public discussion privileges and 2 having club work, social dancing, singing classes and adult societies, all the buildings being open five nights a week, and yet it reported no social centers. Between these two extremes there were many other cases exhibiting similar disparities in the amount of use and the manner of applying the name "social" or "recreation" center.



A New York School Providing an Evening Environment

Current usage varies so greatly that neither of these names can be taken as an index of amount, or even kinds, of activity. This report, therefore, does not show the number of the social centers last season in the United States.

Defining a social center

Before an enumeration of social centers can be made, two things will have to be provided: (1) A definition of them that will serve as a criterion, and (2) data corresponding to the terms of the definition. But a standard center cannot be set up arbitrarily. A definition that would serve as a measuring unit must be based upon achievements rather than ideals. Consequently the data will have to be obtained first.

In attempting to forecast what facts would be needed in formulating a norm two categories, at least, may be safely put forward: (1) the kinds of activities, and (2) their frequency of occurrence. The necessity of the first is obvious and the second becomes equally clear when it is seen what incongruities would result without it. If frequency were not regarded, the city just mentioned which reported "10 social centers" open twice a month would appear in the same class with a municipality maintaining activities six nights a week—a manifest injustice. The very word "center," in this connection, implies activity that not only takes place regularly but also frequently.

A record of evening use needed

If a daily record were kept in each schoolhouse of all the occasions occurring after 6 p.m., information would soon be available upon which a social center definition could be based. Many buildings enjoy a miscellaneous use which probably totals larger than the school authorities suspect, while others commonly regarded as having a high degree of utilization are, in reality, comparatively little used. Until more extensive and detailed records are kept the school officials themselves will not be in a position to determine what degree of wider use has been attained in their school plants. Such information, properly tabulated and interpreted, would form interesting material for the superintendent's report and give the community a better idea of the social dividends they were receiving from their school investments.

Looking beyond the figures

But statistics alone, no matter how accurate and definite they become, will never indicate more than the material aspects of social center activity. To convey their richer significance, they will always require the coöperation of the imagination. Ten

bare-kneed lads, catapulting and ricochetting between basketball hoops, while tenscore more of cheering, exulting, cat-calling humans look on; two dozen bloomered misses stepping and swaying with the beat of a mellow folk rhythm—such scenes as these represent an amount of human happiness that is not revealed by an inventory of the buildings in which they are occurring. One group of struggling musicians converted into an orchestra through the opportunity to meet in a kindergarten plus two Lithuanian cooking clubs learning American ways equal a sum that is beyond ordinary arithmetic.



The Fortnightly Musical Club Entertaining a Cleveland Neighborhood

When neighbors meet on their own common premises and talk over frankly the service they are getting from their public servants there is a quickening of the civic pulse. But it is not expressed by the sum of the buildings in which these meetings take place.

Centers of individual growth and refinement, of civism and social integration, that is what these places are, and no system of numerals can ever be devised that will convey an adequate notion of the vitalizing influences which radiate from them. We can count them and classify their activities, but the results, if they are to "get over" their real meaning, must arouse pictures of living things in the reader's mind.

How to Start Social Centers

(No. Rec.125)

By Clarence Arthur Perry

A pamphlet treating in detailed manner the various problems connected with the initiation of social center work in a community. The different stages of development are fully discussed, as shown by the following

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GETTING THE IDEA

Some of the difficulties—The significance of leadership in play—Function of the social center—What must be added to a school system—The prime reason for state-supported schools—How to impress the school authorities.

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Selecting the organization—Coöperating bodies—The federation.

TAKING UP THE MATTER WITH THE SCHOOL BOARD

Method of approach—Preparation for and conduct of the hearing—Conditions which may prevent favorable action.

REMOVING THE LEGAL OBSTACLES

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CREATING PUBLIC SENTIMENT

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THE DEMONSTRATION

A typical demonstration—Instructing the volunteers—Steps in getting up a demonstration—The workers—Raising the money.

ACTIVITIES POSSIBLE IN THE ORDINARY SCHOOL BUILDING

In the classroom—Kindergarten and basement—Assembly hall and gymnasium—Programs—Information about indoor games.

BEGINNINGS OF PERMANENT SOCIAL CENTERS

Actual working arrangements between boards and associations.

ADAPTING THE SCHOOL BUILDING

Fixing the basement—Baths—The classroom—Movable desks—Getting an assembly hall—Utilizing the attic—The corridor.

WHAT A SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS CAN DO TO DEVELOP SOCIAL CENTERS WITHOUT AN APPROPRIATION

A guiding principle—Liberal regulations—Getting outside bodies to use the building—Labor unions—Discussion of community problems—Political meetings—Stimulating artistic culture—Organizing public lectures and entertainments—Expanding the regular school activities—Getting recreation leaders—The time and energy.

APPENDICES

- A. A Successful Campaign for a Model School Building.
- B. Essential Provisions of the New York State Social Center Law.
- C. Bulletin of Neighborhood Activities, Evanston, Ill.

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